

GORGAS HOSPITAL, ISOLATION WARD  
(Gorgas Hospital, Building 242)  
Culebra Road  
Balboa Heights Vicinity  
Former Panama Canal Zone  
Republic of Panama

HABS No. CZ-11-D

HABS  
CZ  
1-BALH.V  
ID-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Intermountain Field Area  
Rocky Mountain System Support Office  
12795 West Alameda Parkway  
Post Office Box 25287  
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GORGAS HOSPITAL, ISOLATION WARD  
(Building 242)

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For information about other structures at Gorgas Hospital, see:

HABS No. CZ-11	GORGAS HOSPITAL
HABS No. CZ-11-A	ADMINISTRATION AND CLINICS (Building 237)
HABS No. CZ-11-B	KITCHEN AND MESS (Building 238)
HABS No. CZ-11-C	SHOPS AND BOILER HOUSE (Buildings 240 and 240A)
HABS No. CZ-11-E	SECTIONS A AND B (Buildings 255 and 253)
HABS No. CZ-11-F	MORTUARY AND CHAPEL (Building 257)
HABS No. CZ-11-G	SECTION O (Obstetrical Building, Building 261)
HABS No. CZ-11-H	MAIN STAIRS AND PASSAGEWAYS

Location: Culebra Road, Balboa Heights, Former Panama Canal Zone, Republic of Panama

Present Owner: United States Department of Defense

Original Use: Isolation Ward

Present Use: Barracks Without Mess, Standby Health Facility, USA MEDDAC-Panama

Significance: Building 242, the Isolation Ward, performed an important role within the permanent hospital complex which specialized in the treatment of tropical and infectious diseases. Constructed in 1918, this reinforced concrete building with Italian Renaissance detailing was geographically separate from the other hospital buildings but was functionally connected to the Kitchen and Mess by a raised passageway. Now used as a barracks, Building 242 is significant for its architecture and for its role within the medical facility

A. General Statement:

1. History:

Building 242, the Isolation Ward, was unique in its function within the permanent hospital complex built between 1915 and 1919 on the northeast slope of Ancon Hill by the United States government. Construction began in 1917 under the direction of the Building Division of The Panama Canal. The original architectural drawings or "as-builts" date to July 1917 and the statement of responsibility shows that Samuel M. Hitt, the Panama Canal Building Division architect, was responsible for its design while H. Rowe, resident engineer, was credited with the engineering components of the design. T. C. Morris, the Building Division's assistant engineer in charge of foundation work, reinforced concrete, and analyses for size and dimensions of beams, columns and floors, reviewed the plans. Hitt's design provided for a separate but well appointed building for quarantined patient care on a lower elevation from the Kitchen and Mess Building. While geographically separate, it was functionally connected to the latter by a covered raised passageway.

The Annual Report of the Governor for the Panama Canal in 1917 provided a full description of the four story building. The rectangular basement floor was used primarily for smallpox or contagious disease cases while the first floor contained private rooms along a central T-shaped corridor. The upper stories housed two large wards that were reserved for tubercular patients. The building had 88 rooms overall including: 7 wards, 16 private rooms with lavatory, a waiting room, 4 doctors' rooms, 4 nurses' office, 1 nurses' room, 1 orderlies dormitory, 1 mess room, 3 orderlies' workrooms, 2 messes, 3 kitchens, 3 pantries, 20 toilets with bath, 5 toilets, 2 baby bathrooms, plus interior corridors. Each floor was also graced with a 10' by 118' screened full facade front porch which allowed patients to catch the breeze and could also accommodate extra beds if needed.

While separate from the other buildings, Building 242 was considered equal in its appointments to the other wards which included an elevator, fire protection, ice-water bubbling fountains, laundry chute and adequate plumbing for sterilizing. The Annual Report of the Governor of the Panama Canal for 1918 reports that the cost of construction was \$120,235.66.

The building was used as a Isolation Ward until the completion of Building 264. It remained the property of the Panama Canal Company and later the Panama Canal Commission until 1977 when

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it was transferred to the Department of Defense in accord with the 1977 Panama Canal Treaty. It is currently used as a barracks and is officially designated as a Standby Health Facility in the Real Property Records.

### 2. Architectural Character:

Symmetrical and repetitive in its design, Building 242 is a four-story, T-shaped building constructed of reinforced concrete and covered by a red Spanish tile hipped roof. The rear wing has only three floors given the slope of the site. The building is Italian Renaissance in style and architectural details such as rustic quoins, columns and the main entry porte cochere with flat arches were used successfully by Samuel M. Hitt, architect, to harmonize Building 242 with the its companion structures. Set on a hill side, its height gives the building prominence. It is the first building encountered entering the complex from Gorgas Road and it acts as an architectural introduction to the complex. Its front elevation is divided into 11 bays, each separated by columns that provide vertical interest. Long columns bridge the first and second stories while short columns flank each upper story window opening. Window height diminishes between the second and third story. The side and rear elevations are detailed solely by dripstone courses between the ground and first floor and the second and third floor.

The building has been in use since its construction and has been kept in good condition. Exterior modifications include window replacements. Formed plastic modern windows compose the third story fenestration; the basement and first floor windows have modern window replacements and security grills. Exterior wood trim is dark red and the exterior walls are painted in a cream color. Also, a square concrete utility tower has been added to the roof where the wing connects with the main roof. This tower is a recent addition associated with building improvements ongoing since 1993. The interior of the building has been remodeled as part of these improvements. The ground and first floor were remodeled and updated in 1993 and 1994.

### B. Description of the Exterior:

#### 1. Overall Dimensions:

The building is T-shaped in plan, measuring 120' across the front and 76'6" deep. The rear wing is 30'10" in length and 32'6" deep. The front elevation has 11 bays. The building is four stories in height. The basement is 11' in height; the first floor 12'6"; the second floor, 12'6", the third

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floor, 11'. The building contains 24,784 square feet.

2. Foundations:

Foundations are constructed of poured-in place reinforced concrete.

3. Walls:

Load bearing walls and columns are constructed of reinforced concrete; partition walls are concrete block. Annual Reports of the Governor of the Panama Canal prepared by the Resident Engineer for 1916, 1917 and 1918 state that walls less than 6 inches thick were laid in hollow cement block, plastered with two coats of cement and sand stucco and troweled "to a dead finish." Concrete walls were rubbed and filled to match this finish. Exterior walls are detailed with rustic quoins and dripstone courses between floors. Interior walls were treated with two coats of a wash of sulfate of zinc, two coats of flat-finish oil-based paint then a third coat of enamel washable paint.

4. Structural System:

The structural system is a poured-in place reinforced concrete system. The roof system is a wood truss; floors are reinforced concrete slabs.

5. Porches, Exterior stairs:

A full facade, 10' wide, recessed, screened front porch with a concrete floor was originally incorporated into each floor. It is intact on the second floor. The porch area on the ground and first floor has been infilled with modern windows fitted with security grills. The third story screens have also been replaced with modern windows. The main entry porte cochere amply extends from the main entry over Culebra Road. The porte cochere is concrete with two side elevation flat arches, an arch on its front elevation, a dripstone course and stepped bases, and is capped by a balcony with a parapet. It contains a Coke machine and trash receptacle.

6. Chimneys:

None.

7. Openings:

a. Doors:

The recessed main entry is located in the sixth bay on the front elevation and is hooded by the porte cochere. It features a single modern glass door with a glass fixed transom shaped to mimic the flat arch appearance of the ground story windows. A secondary modern door is located on the ground floor of the wing.

b. Windows:

Ground floor windows on the front elevation are slightly arched and are three-fourths fixed glass rectangular windows with an upper plywood transom. Air conditioning units are placed within the plywood area. The first story rectangular windows are filled with louvered glass and fixed glass transoms. The second story porch openings are intact with screening. The third floor of all elevations has modern window replacements of formed plastic; the originals were casement windows with four lights to a side. The rear and side elevation, first and second story windows are all protected by red Spanish tile hoods supported by heavy concrete brackets. Many of the windows on these elevations also have modern replacements and ground floor windows on the rear elevation have been infilled with concrete blocks.

8. Roof:

a. Shape and Materials:

The primary and secondary hipped roofs are supported by a yellow pine wooden truss and covered with red Spanish tile. The shed-roofed window hoods on the rear and side elevations are covered in red Spanish tile and supported by concrete brackets. Copper semi-circular vents are original to the building.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

The floor plan of the ground floor remains intact with a T-shaped corridor traversing the entire floor. Rooms and the central staircase and elevator are accessed through this corridor. The second, and third stories, used as barracks, were inaccessible.

2. Stairways:

The building's levels are accessed by a central concrete staircase that wrapped around the elevator shaft.

3. Flooring:

Tile floors occur throughout the ground floor. Some storerooms still retain the original small white hexagonal tile flooring and sanitary cove tile course.

4. Walls and Ceiling Finishes:

The walls are painted concrete.

5. Openings:

Doors:

Interior doors on the ground floor were both modern and historic with six panel wood doors and transoms in some area and modern replacements in other door frames.

Windows:

No notable window trim or hardware.

6. Decorative Features and Trim:

Built-in cabinets, with upper open storage shelves and cabinets below a counter, were noted on the ground floor in a room once used for storage.

7. Hardware:

Metal laundry chute covers were identified that date to the building's construction.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating and Air Conditioning:

The installation of air conditioning units and electrical and duct work on the ground and first floor occurred in 1993. Ducts are suspended from the ceiling on the ground floor. The upper stories which are used for barracks are centrally cooled via equipment installed in the roof utility tower.

b. Lighting:

The lighting has been updated with fluorescent lighting.

c. Plumbing Fixtures:

The plumbing was updated in 1994 in accordance with the building's use as a barracks. Bathroom fixtures are modern.

d. Conveyance System:

An elevator is centrally located adjacent to the stairs.

9. Original Furnishings:

None noted.



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D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

Building 242 faces northeast, set off and situated on a lower elevation than its companion buildings. Between Culebra Road and Ancon Hill, it is the first building approached within the complex from the Gorgas Road entry. It is connected to the Kitchen and Mess Building on its first floor by a raised passageway. A large concrete drain runs behind the building and remnants of foundations and older drains are visible on the portion of Ancon Hill behind the building.

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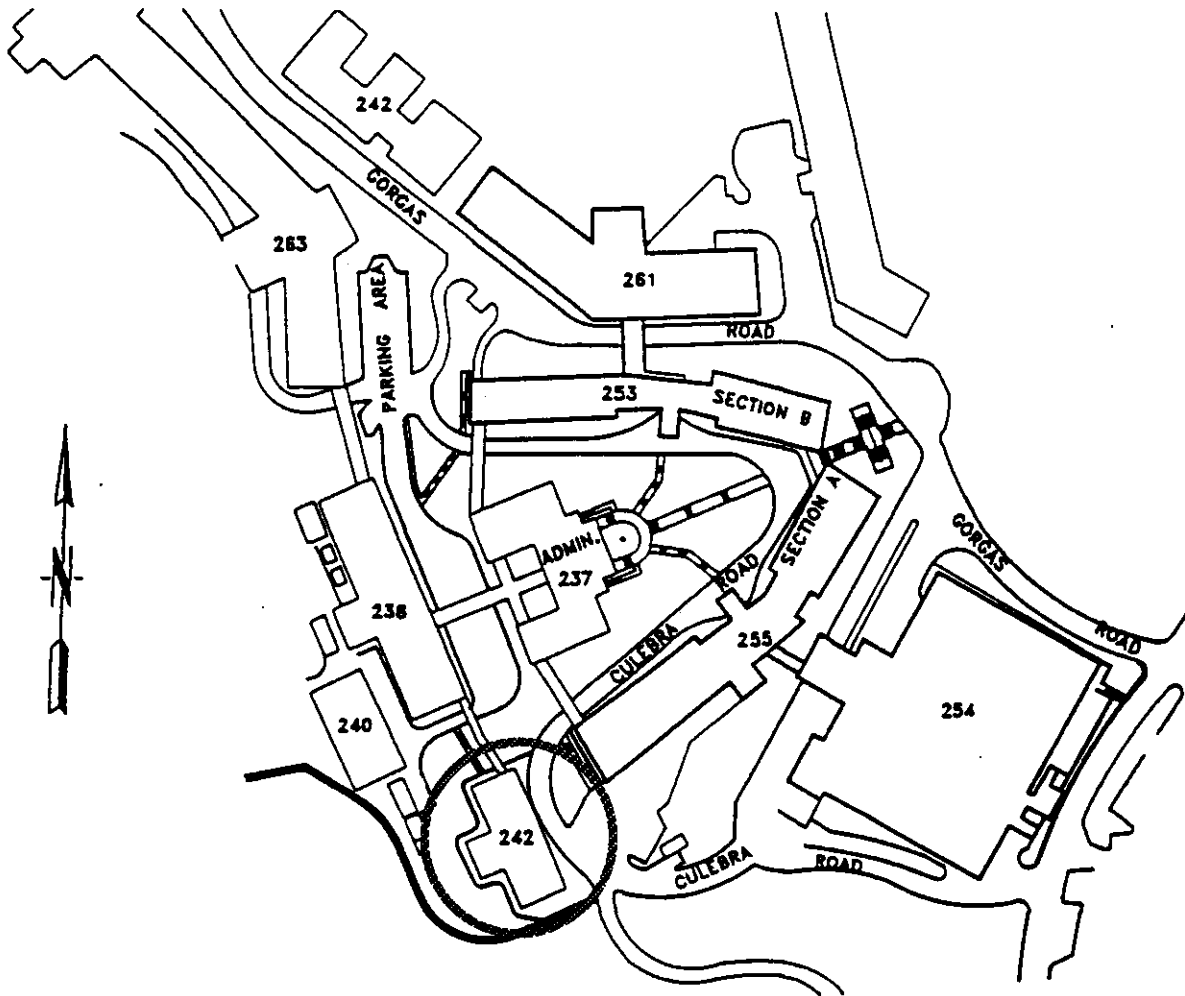


Figure 1 Map, 1996 (original located at Real Property Office, Corozal).  
Mapmaker unknown.  
GORGAS ARMY HOSPITAL COMPLEX

2. Historic Landscape Design:

None found.

3. Outbuildings:

None.